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TILES HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED.

BY CARLY COLEMAN.

PART I.

SOME years ago a learned Italian found in an old library in the city of Florence a manuscript of the fifteenth century on the Art of Painting, in which the author traces the history of the art back to the common father of mankind, and from Adam to God himself, thereby seeking to prove that the art was divine and coeval with the very creation of man.

Although we cannot claim so high an origin or go back quite so far with the history of tiles, nevertheless we can positively state with truth that wherever we find historic man we are sure to find tiles of one kind or another. In fact, among the most ancient documents we have, are records kept upon clay tablets, which are nothing more nor less than tile books. I allude to the Chaldean and Assyrian tablets found in such numbers amid the ruins of Mesopotamian palaces and from which the Assyro-Chaldean student has been able to add many pages to the history of the primitive civilization of man.

That tiles are found so universally under every form of civilization and in every age is not to be wondered at, when we remember that they are made of clay, a substance found in all lands, cheap, plastic in its nature, yielding readily to the hand of man, and becoming fixed by the sun's heat or by fire, and that they lend themselves under their numberless forms not only to many practical ends but also to the highest requirements of decorative art. So we find tiles used as records, floors, walls, roofs, ceilings, tombs, baths, altars, pulpits, altar pieces, friezes, dados, fire-places, hearths, wainscots, table tops, drains, stoves, grills, balconies, and in many other ways.

The higher the art culture of a people the greater their use of tiles. For this reason we hear so often now-a-days about tile, when so much thought is given to the decorative arts and cultivation of artistic taste. A few years ago they were almost unknown in the United States, while to-day there are many tile makers and thousands of dollars invested in the business, and yet the demand is greater than the supply both for domestic and imported goods; therefore it seems to

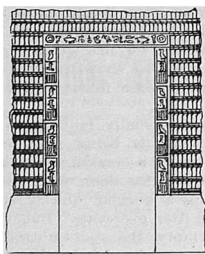


FIG. 1.

me it is high time that the general public should be made acquainted with the history of tile and its use in the past as a decorative medium.

The first thought or question that naturally arises is: What is a tile? To get a true definition we must first consider the origin of the English word "tile." It is derived from the Latin noun *tegula*, and that is formed from the verb *tegere*, to cover, and was used by the Romans to name a piece of baked or dried clay used for covering houses, hence a tile is all forms of baked clay, glazed or unglazed, plain or decorated, which is used to cover, or is applied upon another body or object such as a roof, a floor, or wall, etc. Before 1840 all tiles were plastic, being made from wet clay; since that date the larger part have been made from clay reduced to dust and formed into a tile by pressure.

There are two great families of tiles, unglazed and glazed. The unglazed are subdivided into:

PLAIN, a bisque tile of one color.

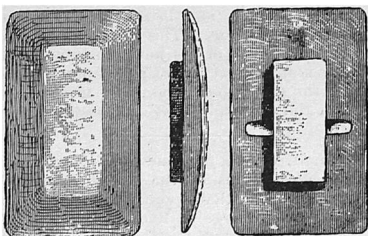


FIG. 2.

INLAID, a tile where one colored clay is forced into another color.

INDENTED, a tile with the designs depressed below the face.

RELIEF, a tile with a design standing above the face.

PRINTED, a tile with a design printed in color upon its face.

Glazed tiles are divided in their turn as follows: vitreous or glass-glazed, plumbeous or lead-glazed, stanniferous or tin-glazed, and are again subdivided into:

PLAIN, a tile faced with a transparent glaze and depending for its color on the bisque or body showing through the glaze.

ENAMELED, a tile having the face covered with a colored glaze.

INCISED, a tile with a design cut through the glaze down to the body or bisque.

INDENTED, a tile with a design scratched or stamped upon the clay body and covered with a glaze.

RELIEF, a tile with a design modeled, pressed, or stamped above the face or background and covered with a glaze.



FIG. 3 b.

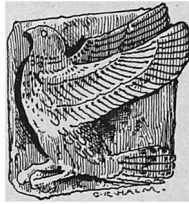


FIG. 3 c.

PAINTED, a tile with a design painted upon the bisque and then glazed, or a tile with the painting upon the glaze itself. In the first case called underglaze and in the last overglaze work.

PRINTED, a tile with a design printed on the bisque and then glazed.

The oldest tile makers that we have any historical knowledge of were unquestionably the Egyptians, who not only made tiles to decorate their buildings with, but also for inlaying wood and bronze objects; however, as with us, their greater use was in architecture, in cases where beauty of decoration was required. This latter application of tiles, with the Egyptians, commenced at a very early period in their history. The inner doorway (fig. 1) of the Pyramid at Laggara was covered with glazed tile of a most beautiful blue, the face slightly convex, and having on the back a pierced tenon, (fig. 2). The color of these tile is truly remarkable, a most delicate celestial blue glaze, obtained from a pure and very white sand, soda and the oxide of copper.

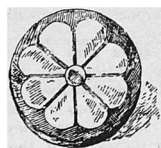


FIG. 4.

In the brick temple of Ramses III., built 1228 years before the Christian era, tiles were used in great numbers on the walls and floors, around the doorways, and upon the outer walls. Some of the tiles were in relief, the body or background in blue or yellow bisque with figures modeled upon it in colored pastes, the garments on the figures of the men in various flat colors, the faces, limbs and hair glazed in appropriate tints (fig. 3). The Egyptians in common with Assyrians, used round inlaid vitrified tiles of white on blue, or the reverse, for the ornamentation of walls (fig. 4), sometimes massed together, but oftener as string courses and for giving a riveted effect to their walls. Like the Assyrians, but not so generally, they wrote upon tile tablets, not by incising the characters upon an unglazed tile, but like the modern Chinese school-boy writes them with black ink. That the Jews used tiles for the same purpose we know from the words of the prophet Ezekiel iv., 1:

"And thou, O son of man, take thee a tile and lay it before thee, and draw upon it the plan of the city of Jerusalem."

The Babylonians and Assyrians carried the art of tile making and their application, both for

practical and artistic purposes, to a much higher point than the Egyptians, and in fact than any other of the ancient nations.

Their glazes are brighter and finer, their range of color greater, and their forms more numerous. One of their most novel forms was a cone-shaped tile, three and a half inches long, of a yellow body, having its base dipped in color and its apex running to a sharp point (fig. 5). These tiles were not only fixed to flat walls, but also to curved surfaces, the apex being imbedded in cement, the colored base turned outward and arranged in patterns of various designs (fig. 6).



FIG. 5.

The tiles of Chaldea were in part bas-relief, obtained by piling on the color or enamel, while on the other hand the Assyrian tiles were flat, with the single exception of their round tiles, which were used in vast numbers about doorways and the upper parts of walls, the central boss being in low relief (fig. 7).

In Assyria, pictures and geometric designs of large size were executed upon the walls of temples and palaces by uniting tiles, on each of which a portion of the general pattern was made (fig. 8). The ceiling tiles were of diverse forms—round, square, square with concave edges—but in all cases having a round hole in the center, through which a pin or boss of metal or ivory could be passed to hold them securely in their place (fig. 9).

The prevailing colors in the glaze tiles were blue, red, a deep yellow, white, green, black, gold and silver, while the unglazed or floor tiles were but of two colors, a dark red and a yellowish white.

The extreme gorgeousness of the tile-incrusted buildings of Assyria, as they flashed forth their beauty under a brilliant Oriental sun, is hard to picture to our minds, accustomed as we are to the colorless architecture of the present day. Is there not a lesson to be learned here? Should we not be more bold in our use of color, not only for interior but also for exterior decoration? No doubt color will be used more freely among us when our architects are properly educated, when they become not only good constructors but have also a knowledge of artistic proportion, harmony of design, and the decorative principle governing the use of materials in their relations of color and texture to the whole structure and to one another.

Among the practical uses that tiles were put



FIG. 6 a.



FIG. 6 b.

to in Babylonia (626 B. C. to 522 B. C.) was that of a circulating medium. The tiles used were four and a half inches in length by one to three inches in breadth, with their value in gold or silver, the name of the reigning king, and the date of issue inscribed on their face.

Very little is known about the tiles of the Jews and Phoenicians, so little, that some archaeologists have doubted if these people used them to any great extent.

Among the Greeks tiles were used in large numbers, that is the unglazed kind, for tombs, for roofs and floors, pediments and friezes; as to their glazed tiles we know little or nothing. How far they carried the art of tile making it is hard to say, although we know from their writers and the examples of their other pottery that they must have attained a high standard.

With the Etruscans tiles were principally used to line the walls of tombs. The tiles were large, forty inches long and twenty inches wide, with figures and inscriptions painted on them in red, black and white, and burnt in the tile (fig. 10).

The Romans inherited the art of tile making from their Etruscan forefathers, and also used them as they did for tombs, but more commonly on the walls and roofs of their houses; these tiles were sometimes scale

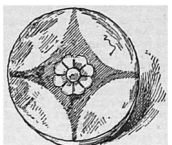


FIG. 7.



FIG. 8.

shaped, sometimes oblong, oftener flanged; in color they were of a rich red and bright yellow. The floor tiles were made in small cubes of various colors and were set in patterns.



FIG. 9.

With the fall of the Roman world, the art of tile making, like all other arts, passed under a cloud, but only for a while, for it was brought to life again by the Mohammedans in the East and the Monks in the West, to shine with greater splendor than ever before. In our next we will take up the history of this period of revival.



FIG. 10.

ROOMS AT THE HEALTH EXHIBITION.

VISITORS to that remarkable show, the Health Exhibition in London, missed a noteworthy feature of it if they failed to see, in a modest nook in that wilderness of halls and pavilions, a series of neat little chambers designed to exhibit the charms of wall hangings of cloth in place of paper. I am frank to allow that I consider the employment of cloth hangings in a city house a measure of doubtful advisability, since they might retain, not only dust from streets and evil odors from lack of ventilation, but germs of disease likewise.

It would be well if we could do away with carpets, substituting polished floors and rugs for purely sanitary reasons, and every housekeeper is aware that even lace curtains gather and hold a surprising quantity of dust. Our streets are so ill-kept that it is impossible to keep dust out of doors and windows. But despite these objections I confess to being more captivated by those pretty little rooms, than by any that I saw in England.

They were so light, so bright, so cheery, so restful in their simple arrangement and color harmony, so dainty and refined that one might settle down in any one of them with the same natural enjoyment that a bee or butterfly might feel in taking his station in the heart of a rose or lily.

The breakfast room was furnished and decorated in white. Graceful little cabinets of white wood, chairs upholstered in white cretonne with delicate flower patterns, a round table set with white china, rugs on the well-waxed floor that had a little more white than usual in their composition, and walls and ceiling sheathed in linen with a pale figure printed on it, gave to this apartment an aspect of positive radiance. It wanted only a gentleman in gown and slippers, and a healthy-faced English girl in a soft white *négligé* dress at the table to make the scene idyllic.

A little winding glass-covered arcade opened from this room and formed a sort of greenhouse, containing rock work, a fountain and plants and flowers that exhaled a warm and fragrant summer breath into the breakfast room and set the caged bird a-singing in belief that he had been transplanted to a clime far distant from smoky London. This conservatory differed from the common run of such structures in being built irregularly so that as you stood at one end or its opposite you could not see through it. Little capes of rock work, first on one side, then on the other, emphasized the windings of the path and gave it more the impression of extent than if it had been a simple glass-topped corridor, like a hall, through which the eye could penetrate with perfect freedom. This plan of reserving something from immediate view, thereby piquing curiosity and interest, might be introduced with advantage into many other rooms than conservatories.

A room should no more reveal to the eye at a glance everything that it contains, than should a book or human character. The dining-room in blue, was appropriately upholstered and draped. Its chairs at the table were luxurious enough to increase the pleasures of a "square meal," and overhead the entire ceiling was upholstered in a material similar to that used as wall hangings and "gathered" by worsted balls. In the bedroom a neat and quiet style of furnishing had been chosen, and the appropriate oddity was here noticed of a water jug on the wash-stand patterned upon the prevalent figure in the wall paper.

JAPANESE WALL PAPER.

OF late years very considerable supplies of Japanese wall paper have been imported into this country, designed to come into competition with embossed decorated leather, the forms in relief being impressed by dies, whilst the coloring and varnishing are done by hand. Although the designs are not strictly imitative, possessing essentially Japanese characteristics, they exhibit many departures from the customary mode of treatment, in some instances in the greater elaboration of details. The surface of the coarse tough paper itself assimilates to that of leather, and where it is desired to render the ground absolutely smooth, lacquering comes in. This so-called leather paper is manufactured exclusively at the Imperial Factory of Yokohama, a Government concern. In this article the Japanese seek to turn their imitative faculties to account.

The native paper, previous to its production, was in small squares pieced together in covering the surface of the wall. The authorities of the factory secured some three years since the requisite machinery for making paper in rolls of a size suited to western markets, the appliances including for the imitation of leather work, enormous dies. The rolls come in sizes of twelve yards in length and one in width, each being equal to three English or French rolls. A varnish is applied to the colors and gold laid on, which is a secret preparation wholly transparent and having an all but imperceptible gloss. Besides protecting the colors and gold it is claimed that it renders the paper impervious to damp. The paints are of the enamel class, brilliant and sombre as required, and the paper has undoubtedly great durability. The variety of patterns displays the fecundity of the inventive faculty of the artists. Whilst in one piece cut flowers and stems are scattered at distant intervals on a field of gold or bronze, other pieces will show an apparently inextricable blending of devices such as plumage, butterflies, gnarled trunks of trees, flowers, leaves, berries, fruit resting at times on what may be described as a middle ground of curiously involved lines, now in whirlpool eddies, and again like streams seeking an outlet. The tortoise is a favorite form from which radiates, as from a center, numerous fanciful devices. Some patterns are

suggestive of the lunar surface broken up with volcanoes, ridges, deep shadows, and undulating waves of light. There are patterns that repeat in various forms the native legend of a prince of one of the islands of the archipelago who rode on a tortoise to paradise, which the Japanese locate beneath the sea, to visit the queen of that domain from whom he receives a mystic gift, the tortoise being surrounded with aquatic plants and marine shells.

In one design for a ceiling in gold and lacquer the Mikado and five attendant handmaids are represented in separate circles, the additional ornament to folds of dress consisting of Japanese lettering. The chief attraction of this leather paper is the excellence of the colors, particularly purples, vermillions, blues, greens, and bronze, and their disposition with reference to general effect.

One background that caught our attention for its novelty, is of frosted gold, the frost unequally distributed; this involving most delicate manipulation and only visible at certain angles of light. Chrysanthemums and cherry blossoms are freely introduced, and there appears a strong preference for the hawthorn among plants. A design, somewhat unique, consists of covering the whole surface with the "eyes" of peacocks' feathers, these partially overlapping each other like scales on a coat of mail.

Some of these patterns are of a sombre, subdued hue, but the majority are somewhat garish and gaudy, manifestly under the mistaken impression that these would prove the most acceptable to western taste. This Japanese paper will be chiefly used on rooms where a curious bizarre appearance is desired. Our own designs in embossed leather are not to be approached by Orientals in tasteful elegance. The fanciful Japanese combinations may, however, prove here and there, usefully suggestive to designers.

CHINESE METHOD OF BRONZING.

THE Chinese execute the art of bronzing in a very superior manner. Their method is as follows: After having rubbed the vase or other ornament with coal ashes and vinegar, they dry it in the sun and then coat it with a composition of which the following are the ingredients: Two parts of verdigris, two of cinnabar, two of sal ammoniac, two of the beak and liver of duck and two of pounded alum, moistened to the consistency of paste. When the article is thus prepared it is passed through the fire and washed when cold; again it is coated with the composition, again fired, and again washed, and so on for several times in succession.

It is decidedly curious that in a country where dogs and horses are at such a premium of popularity we have so few artists who paint them, and none who paint them with any approach to power. The animal painter has always been popular and prosperous in England, and animal painting has commanded some of the greatest talents of that nation. With us it seems the last work any artist dreams of cultivating, and one he works in with so little spirit when he does cultivate it, that we might fancy he was ashamed of his employment and followed it under protest.

SOME years ago our shops began to display excellent examples of popular Italian art in terra cotta or bisque. They were usually single figures, or at most, simple groups full of character and spirit. Their favor with us has, as usual, depraved their production till it is almost impossible to find one worth a place in any room in which the furnishings are not as vulgar as themselves. But they seem to sell yet, like a great many other objects whose old popularity gives them a fictitious value even when their intrinsic merit has disappeared.

THE rage for etchings has settled down, as might have been foreseen, into a steady and growing demand for the best work only. The day has passed when any scratched plate could be put upon the market and find a ready sale merely because it was an etching. The public now want pictures with subjects of interest, executed in the perfection of the art, and the artists and publishers are supplying the want with some of the noblest productions which modern times have given origin to.

